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UNCLAS DHAKA 000290

SIPDIS

FOR SA/PPD (SSTRYKER)

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SUBJECT: SUGGESTED PRESS GUIDANCE - NYT MAGAZINE ARTICLE ON BANGLADESH

1. In the January 23 edition of the New York Times Magazine, an article on Bangladesh entitled "The Next Islamic Revolution?" is generating significant local reaction. In the event it is raised at the noon press briefing or with SA/PB, we suggest the following guidance:

Q: THE NEW YORK TIMES MAGAZINE ARTICLE ON BANGLADESH SUGGESTS IT IS ON THE VERGE OF BECOMING A RADICAL ISLAMIC REPUBLIC. DO YOU AGREE WITH THAT ASSESSMENT?

A: Our concerns about the actions and the profile of extremist elements in Bangladesh are well known. We regularly call on the Bangladesh Government to support human rights, the rule of law, and to protect all Bangladeshis, including religious minorities, from extremists.

We remain hopeful about Bangladesh's future. A traditionally moderate and tolerant country, it has made great strides in its socio-economic development since independence in 1971. Bangladeshis have fought hard for the right to vote and to be governed democratically. Ultimately, however, the future of Bangladesh hinges on its ability to remain true to these traditions, to hold free and fair elections, to combat corruption effectively, to expand economic growth, and to treat all citizens with equal respect and dignity.

There is a picture accompanying Ms. Griswold's article of an anti-Ahmadiyya rally last November - it's worth mentioning that the police maintained the peace at that rally, and blocked efforts by extremists to capture the Ahmaddiya central headquarters in downtown Dhaka.

Q: WHO IS BANGLA BHAI? IS HE A SERIOUS THREAT?

A: Bangla Bhai's identity, as well as his current whereabouts or activities, is unclear. He and his followers have allegedly been involved in murder and other criminal acts, and the Bangladesh Government states that it has issued a warrant for his arrest. We hope that Bangla Bhai, like all alleged criminals, are brought to justice.

Q: IS IT TRUE THAT YOU PRESSURED THE BANGLADESH GOVERNMENT TO CLOSE TWO EXTREMIST CAMPS LAST YEAR?

A: We can't comment on diplomatic exchanges, but we have regularly urged the Bangladesh Government to investigate allegations of extremist activities in Bangladesh, take appropriate corrective actions, solve well-publicized crimes with alleged extremist connections, and to act in a manner consistent with its support for the global war against terrorism.

Q: DID THE CHITTAGONG ARMS HAUL RESULT FROM AN INDIAN INTELLIGENCE TIP?

A: You should direct that question to the Indian or Bangladeshi governments.

THOMAS